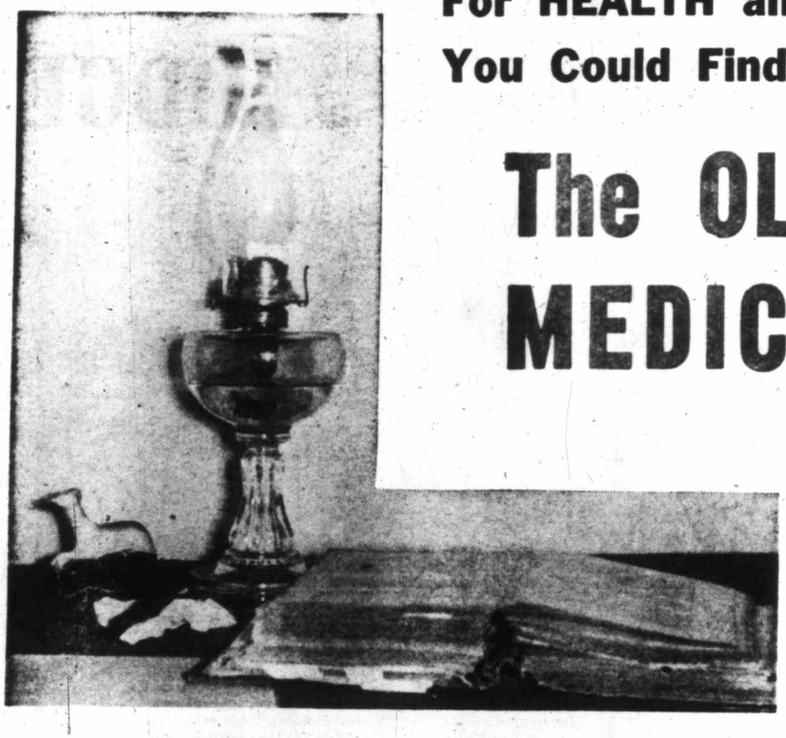
For HEALTH and LONG LIFE You Could Find the Answer

The OLD FAMILY MEDICAL BOOK



By VERA SCOTT

DURING THE YEARS that the old "Horse and Buggy" doctor was slowly evolving into the "Tin Lizzie" doctor, many parts of all the world's countries boasted no doctor at all. It may have been for this reason, as much as others, that the "Family Medical Book," under various names, was introduced to a people who managed to stay alive if they were lucky, died if it were so intended, and rarely accepted an invitation without verbally or mentally adding, "If God spares me."

Whether present day family Medical Books are a bane or a blessing is not really important. Transportation is swift and good doctors conveniently handy, but in the days when the reverse was more often the rule than the exception, the old medical books must have proved a comfort to families under stress of illness when without doctors. At least, leafing through the old books searching for a disease to pin symptons on gave them a sense of doing something constructive rather than sitting idly by while their patient suffered. And in many cases the cures were effective and patients lived to expound their faith in the book that "helped them through."

Our old medical book that I still have has been in our family for over 50 years. It is a strange and marvelous work.

Compiled in the latter part of the 19th century by then prominent members of the medical profession in the United States, Europe and Japan, it took more than ten years to complete. Even before its release from the publishers at the turn of the present century many of its "infallible" cures must have been outdated.

Its publishers declared that it was written for the "average" reader who could "avail himself of its aid as readily and effectually as the most accomplished scholar, "inasmuch as the merits of the book were not obscured by "an effort to mystify its contents with high sounding phrases, or euphonious but incomprehensible technicalities.'"

The book starts with the new discovery of the "immense therapeutic value of the sun bath," the equally new and positive proof that "taking a picture through a man's body" is possible, and ends on the heartening note of "How to Live Indefinitely." In case you are interested in living indefinitely, the answer is distilled water. Drink gallons of it!

THE MANY, many pages between the alpha and omega of the book are devoted to practically every disease and its several cures then known to doctors, midwives and dear old grannies. It is suggested that before the reader attempt any cures, he study the book thoroughly.

There is a list of medicines in Latin and plain English; a general index of all ailments; a bemuscled manikin in color that opens out like a concertina revealing all his inward and outward parts conveniently numbered for finding in the explanatory key on the facing page; a glossary or explanation of terms used in the book; several pages on easy and accurate methods of diagnosing or determining diseases; tables of weights and measures; instructions on how to prepare poultices and fomentations; 387 listed medical plants with directions on how to prepare them; and other necessary information if the average man is going to care for his own and his family's health. The only serious omission in the old Family Medical Book is the MD's plaque to tack on his front door when his studies are finished.

The remedies in most cases are simple, providing the reader had done a little serious studying in his spare time and knew how to diagnose, prepare and apply.

The book's Japanese department is interesting and colorful. Japan in those days had no use for drugs that "must be injurious to the human system." Their pain-killing, life-saving remedies were derived from plants, vegetables, fruits and trees. Beautiful colored plates show what they looked like. Red pepper (cayenne) would end la grippe in 24 hours; common white navy beans, boiled soft and applied externally, cured the very worst cases of erysiplas; the onion banished pnemonia; hops cured sleeplessness; and if you suffered an attack of the "dread disease" inflamation of the bowl (appendicitis), wild yams in most cases were infallible—if you acted quickly.

LEMONS ALONE, "as a medicine a marvelous gift to man," were used effectively in 22 listed diseases.

Though not so easy to take, Russian remedies were considered just as good as those in other lands. Russia owned the world's most famous "salt mines," and a "health spring of coal oil." Their remedies were drawn from these natural resources and lauded by American doctors.

Italy was the first to draw attention to the healing power of laughter. "Of course," it is pointed out, "it will be objected that a person cannot laugh when he does not feel like laughing . . . The idea that no one can laugh except those so gifted by nature is a superstition that can no more stand the light of modern knowledge than the 'unlucky Friday' superstition of fear of the number 13."

The old-time average man probably tried laughing when all else failed, and discovered—to his consternation—that it worked. It still works. Try it!

A section that must have delighted men, and at the same time set women roaring for the right to vote, was the one devoted to hair. Under the heading of "Hair indicative of character," are given the characteristics of man or woman possessing black hair, fine hair, coarse hair, hair that sticks up, and hair that drops out.

The hair that "dropped out" was the bone of contention. Man's baldness was attributed to "Excessive action of the brain, such as intense study, great mental anxiety . . ." Not so woman. If her hair thinned to the point of baldness it was her own fault. She was a silly "martyr to fashion."

Morals are heavily propounded. There are lectures for girls and young men that should have shrivelled the souls of those eyeing the "primrose path." There is a section on how to choose a husband or a wife. Young men are warned against pretty faces and girls who hang around millinery stores like butterflies.

"When the activity of the mind is taken up with finery the soul grows pinched and mean."

Girls are given a sure-fire test for securing a good husband. "Introduce your young man to some old lady and leave him with her awhile. The longer the better. Then ask the old lady what she thought about him."

Present-day girls would be wise not to try this. What today's old ladies lack in youth they more than make up in charm, and the girl's potential husband might easily slip through her fingers.

COSMETIC HINTS for women come next and some of the wrinkle-chasers are drastic enough to be good. A facial mask of almond oil and tar tops them all. This is to be applied to the face at bed time, and a soft cloth laid over the bed linen to protect it. It doesn't say whether the face or the wrinkles leave, but one or the other would be bound to disappear before morning.

The uses and abuses of clothing come in for a lashing, and for sheer emotional appeal, rivaling present-day TV commercials, is one delivered on the abomination of the waist belt. The pleader was a woman and probably gasping for breath while she wrote, "Parents, I pray you plead with your daughters; husbands, beseech you wives; young men, beg your sweethearts to stay the destructive effect of the fell destroyer of the human race—the waist belt and chest compressor . . ."

Life was a serious business in the days of the old Family Medical Book. Man's life was precious. Two world wars, pestilence on a grand scale, depression, boom, fear of man's ultimate, callous destruction of man, had not yet happened to harden his heart to all things unproved by science, or dull his mind to the true purpose of his earthly existance. His worth was counted higher than dollars and cents.

Dealing wits sickness, resulting far too often in death, the doctors of those days were probably more aware than now of the intrinsic value of man's individual life.

CHILD MORTALITY was high and in one writing, at least, the doctor's patience with ignorance snaps. Condemning some of the mothers of his time, he asserts:

"There are various sections in this book pertaining to children and their diseases which should be read and re-read by every mother, but far too many are impressed with their own capacity and think that they know enough on this subject from the fact that they have 'raised children,' or 'their mothers have' . . . They really know just enough to destroy the lives of one-half of their children and render the other half more or less diseased or sickly . . . The facts should excite a blush of shame."

Straight talk from sincere men of superior knowledge and wisdom never hurt anyone. Too little of it is practised today by members of the medical profession, who resort to prescribing a pill for every pain rather than sound, honest criticism that would "excite a blush of shame."

The old Family Medical Book, along with the "horse and buggy doctor" and the "tin Lizzie" doctor, is almost a thing of the past. But it should not be lightly tossed aside, for, catching the mood and temperament of the age for which it was written, it is a slice from the heart of history.